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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: PRO-LTTE PARTY SAYS "INDIAN MODEL" FOR
DEVOLUTION WON'T WORK HERE

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: A Member of Parliament from Jaffna for the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), a pro-Tamil Tiger party, told us on November 8 that the Indian constitution was worth studying, but that the "Indian model" of federalism would not work in Sri Lanka. He thought the Indian government was in a position to influence both sides in Sri Lanka's conflict, but was reluctant to re-engage. Still, he reported that Indian Prime Minister Singh had told Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa that the merger of the North and East Provinces, recently invalidated by the Sri Lankan Supreme Court, had to be reinstated, or the Indians "would have to review all options." To solve the problem of Sri Lanka's East, where there are significant numbers of Sinhalese and Muslims in addition to Tamils, the MP recommended a kind of "federalism within federalism." The TNA has no reservations about humanitarian resupply of Jaffna through India or the UN as a stopgap measure, he said, but insists on the reopening of the A-9 highway linking Jaffna to the south. He reported that his party considers the Supreme Court decision "de-merging" the North and East Provinces as anathema to the peace process, but is still working out a response to the government's proposal of a referendum in the East to legitimize the merger. End summary.

PRO-LTTE PARTY REJECTS APPLYING AN "INDIAN MODEL" TO SRI LANKA

¶2. (C) In a conversation with Pol Chief on November 8, Tamil National Alliance Member of Parliament for Jaffna Gajendrakumar Ponnambulam amplified his recent comments in a newspaper interview, in which he rejected the idea of an "Indian model" for decentralized power. The Indian constitution works well for India, he said. However, it came about at a time when India) through Partition) had just split off the two regions that had pronounced separatist movements (today's Pakistan and Bangladesh). There were, at that time, no other remaining regions with "fissiparous" tendencies, he said. The situation in Sri Lanka today is not

analogous, he maintained. As to what model of "devolution" might work for Sri Lanka, especially the East, Ponnambulam said that he could only imagine some kind of "federalism within federalism," i.e., a substantially autonomous administration for Muslim-majority parts of the southeast, even if these areas are non-contiguous.

¶3. (C) Further, Ponnabulam said, the centralized executive powers present in the Indian Constitution (he cited the President's authority to dismiss the elected Chief Minister of a state and impose direct rule) are something the Sri Lankan Tamils could never accept. He told us that Tamils could be certain that the central government would consistently abuse such powers. He said his party had no objection to studying the Indian system for whatever Sri Lanka could learn from it.

INDIAN ROLE IN THE PEACE PROCESS?

¶4. (C) Ponnambulam said that India, as the pre-eminent regional power, was respected by both sides in Sri Lanka's conflict and could influence them. But he was doubtful that India was ready to engage again, other than perhaps providing a one-off shipment of humanitarian supplies to Jaffna. He thought it more likely that India might work behind-the-scenes with the Norwegian facilitators and the other Co-Chairs - but he did not think India was ready even for that yet.

¶5. (C) Ponnambulam had no objection to either India or the UN resupplying Jaffna as a temporary measure. The LTTE would probably not give explicit guarantees for the safety of

COLOMBO 00001874 002 OF 002

supply ships, but was very unlikely to attack them, he thought. He insisted that a resupply by sea should not affect or delay the reopening of the A-9, however. He rejected the alternate route proposed by the Sri Lankan military since it is not an all-land route, but would involve a transfer from Pooneryn by ferry. He thought that the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission could observe the crossing point at Muhamalai to deter military actions and asked why the GSL would not permit this.

"DE-MERGER" CONTINUES TO BE A STUMBLING BLOCK

¶6. (C) Ponnambulam said that his party had spent all the previous day in consultations over the Prime Minister's proposal for referenda in the East and the North. They were still not sure how to respond. He had also met opposition leader Ranil Wickemesinghe. Ponnambulam conceded that, in principle, it was hard to be against consulting the people. According to the Indo-Lanka accord, there was to be a referendum after the merger. However, he said India had, in the late 1980s, given the Tamils secret assurances the referendum would never be held. Still, the Tamil parties would not reject a referendum out-of-hand: it would depend on how and when, and the legal framework. He pointed out the difficulties or organizing a referendum under current conditions and said he doubted it would happen.

¶7. (S) Ponnambulam said he had met the Indian National Security Advisor recently in New Delhi, who recounted a meeting between Indian Manmohan Singh and President Rajapaksa at the mid-October meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement meeting in Havana. Singh reportedly insisted on Sri Lanka keeping to the terms of the Indo-Lanka accord, telling Rajapaksa the merger would have to be reinstituted, or India "would have to review all options."

¶8. (C) COMMENT: Ponnambulam's party, although considered Tamil moderates, usually aligns with LTTE views on political matters. The "de-merger" of the North and East and the continued closure of the A-9 remain quintessential issues for

most Tamil representatives, and it will be difficult to make progress on continued peace talks without some Sri Lankan government movement on these. The "federalism with federalism" idea of self-government for Muslim-majority enclaves in the Southeast is consistent with most Muslim views, and probably represents the minimum that Muslims could accept in exchange for their integration into a Tamil-majority semi-autonomous area in a merged Northeastern province.

BLAKE